

SUPERIOR COURT IS YOUR COURT

The Superior Court is an important part of your community. It belongs to every citizen. The court hears cases involving civil law, criminal law, traffic infractions, family law, juvenile law, and other areas of law such as mental health.

The Presiding Judge supervises the court and is responsible for assigning judges and commissioners to their courtrooms, distributing the work among them. The Presiding Judge regularly meets with other judges, attorneys, and administrators to discuss the business of the court and plan how the court will operate efficiently.

The Court Executive Officer administers the court and is responsible for supervising the court's employees, summoning jurors, and conducting the administrative and operational business of the court.

TYPES OF CASES HEARD IN COURT

Criminal Cases – There are two types of criminal cases heard at the court: misdemeanors and felonies. Misdemeanors are less serious crimes carrying a sentence of no more than one year in county jail. Felonies are more serious cases that carry sentences ranging from more than a year in state prison to, in some murder cases, death.

Those persons accused of a crime go to court for trial and if convicted are ordered to pay a fine, serve probation, or go to jail or prison depending on the severity of the offense. Misdemeanor offenses include shoplifting, vandalism, and drunk driving while felony cases include burglary, robbery, and murder.

Over the last ten years a new type of court has been developed. These courts are known as “problem solving courts” and involve rehabilitation rather than punishment. One example of this type of court is Drug Treatment Court where misdemeanor or felony drug offenders undergo treatment and ongoing judicial supervision.

Civil Cases – The court hears a variety of civil cases. A civil case requires the court to settle a conflict between persons or companies. This can be accomplished in a wide variety of ways ranging from mediation to a trial by jury. One type of Civil Law case is the Small Claims case in which the amount in dispute is \$5,000 dollars or less. Attorneys are not allowed to represent litigants in these types of cases.

Traffic Cases – A traffic ticket is issued by a police officer for most traffic violations. These tickets normally involve fines and points on the offenders DMV record. Most traffic fines are paid by mail but the offender can dispute the ticket by appearing before the court.

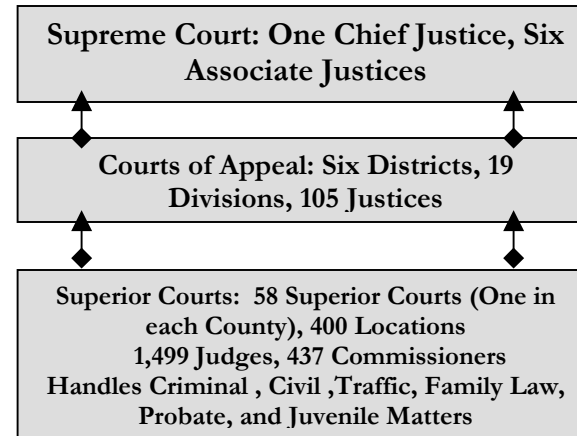
Family Law Cases – There are many different types of cases in family law but the most common is the dissolution of marriage – divorce. The court makes orders regarding child custody and child support as well as other issues faced by these litigants. The court also makes rulings regarding paternity (parentage), adoption and visitation. The court provides mediators in particularly difficult cases where the parties cannot agree.

Juvenile Law Cases – There are two types of juvenile court hearings; delinquency hearings, where a minor child is accused of committing a crime and dependency hearings, where a minor is found to be the victim of abuse or neglect. Both types of cases can result in the minor being declared a ward of the court.

Those the court finds to be delinquent may be placed on probation, put in juvenile hall, sent to the California Youth Authority, or in serious cases, sent to criminal court to be tried as an adult. Minors who become wards of the court through a dependency hearing may be placed with their parents, other family members, or foster care.

GUIDE TO CALIFORNIA COURTS

California has two types of courts: the trial court, known as the Superior Court (there are 58 superior courts in California—one in each county) and the appellate courts, including the California Supreme Court.



Cases Flow Upwards from Superior to Supreme Court



CALIFORNIA SUPREME COURT

- Hears oral arguments in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Sacramento;
- Has discretionary authority to review decisions of the Courts of Appeal and direct responsibility for automatic appeals after death penalty judgments www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courts/supreme/about.htm

COURTS OF APPEAL

- Six districts, 19 divisions, 9 court locations
- Review the majority of appealable orders or judgments from the superior courts www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courts/courtssofar/appeal/about.htm

SUPERIOR COURTS

- Fifty-eight courts, one in each county, with from 1 to 55 branches
- State and local laws define crimes, specify punishments

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

Administrative Office of the Courts

- The Judicial Council is the constitutionally created 27-member policymaking body of the California courts; its staff agency is the Administrative Office of the Courts (www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courtadmin/jc)

Commission on Judicial Performance

- Responsible for the censure, removal, retirement, or private admonishment of judges and commissioners. Decisions subject to review by the California Supreme Court (www.cjp.ca.gov)

WHO’S WHO IN THE COURTROOM

Judge – A public official either elected by the people or appointed by the governor.

Commissioner – A judicial officer, appointed by the judges to handle some of the court’s cases.

Plaintiff – In a criminal case, the district attorney. In a civil case the party who brings the complaint.

Defendant – In a criminal case, the accused. In a civil case, the person who is being sued.

Juror – A citizen and resident of Alameda County who is part of a panel, usually twelve members in size, who decides the guilt or innocence of a defendant or the outcome of a civil case.

Attorney – Lawyers for either party in any type of case except for small claims cases.

Witness – A person who testifies under oath

Bailiff – A deputy sheriff or marshal responsible for courtroom security.

Court Attendant – The civilian counterpart to the Bailiff. Court attendants control the courtroom in civil court.

Court Reporter – A stenographer who records all actual statements of everyone in the courtroom.

Court Clerk – One who keeps records for the court, swears in witnesses, and keeps the evidence.

Interpreter – A person who translates English into other languages for defendants, plaintiffs, or witnesses who do not speak or understand English

SUPERIOR COURT LOCATIONS

Oakland

René C. Davidson Courthouse

Wiley W. Manuel Courthouse

County Probation Center

U.S. Post Office Building

County Administration Building

Allen E. Broussard Justice Center

San Leandro

John George Psychiatric Pavilion

County Juvenile Hall

Other Locations

Berkeley Courthouse

Fremont Hall of Justice

Hayward Hall of Justice

Gale/Schenone Hall of Justice - Pleasanton

George E. McDonald Hall of Justice – Alameda

QUICK FACTS ABOUT THE SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF ALAMEDA

Serves 1.5 million Alameda County residents

Includes 15 court locations and 99 courtrooms

Has an annual budget of 90 million dollars

Annually collects 25 million dollars in fines, fees and bail forfeitures

Handled more than 342,000 cases last year

Staffed by 69 judges and 16 commissioners

Employs over 800 full-time employees

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Public Information Office
Superior Court of California
County of Alameda
1225 Fallon St. Room 104-M
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 272-6504

Websites

www.co.alameda.ca.us/courts

www.courtinfo.ca.gov

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/otherwebsites.htm



A VISIT TO THE COURTHOUSE



A Guide to the Superior Court of California, County of Alameda